

# CONSIDER THIS MY THESIS

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I would like to dedicate this written work to all the future MFA graduates at the Herron School of Art and Design. Always remember that the theory is theoretical and that your art is real. Good Luck.

## 1. Consider my art a maze.

*"Happiness, that grand mistress of the ceremonies in the dance of life, impels us through all its mazes and meanderings, but leads none of us by the same route."*

-Charles Caleb Colton

Life is often compared to a maze. Each decision is a path that leads to another path, towards some goal and, inevitably, an exit. But the puzzle of the maze is invented, and life is real. My art is the maze of how I see my own life's decisions map around me. It is presented as an entry into my own thoughts. It is offered as an exercise in sharing another's vision. If you take my hand and walk through it, you will experience how I choose one obstacle over the other. You can follow my steps and tread my course with me.

It doesn't matter that the maze we navigate is of my own creation. I am naive and forgetful beyond the task at hand. What I remember is a fanciful dream mostly forgotten in the ritual of the labor. We enter this maze together as equal partners and your hand is in my hand too. If you pull, I will give, and follow to see where you are drawn. My curiosity is contagious in my maze as the passages puzzle circles around us. The labyrinth is a riddle for our feet that is only as good as it's telling.

Every maze contains a hidden path that is obscured at first glance by the total visible structure of the whole. The initial solution is carved, as a network of available routes, and around it a set of obstructions is laid out within an open area. In my maze the obstructions are many. They are my style, my intent, my will and my hand. They are every element that speaks of "me" over "us" as we work out our incremental sequence of choices that brings us deeper into the unknowable design.

The form of a maze's solution is not important. Chances are, you will never even think of its complete shape. Even if you solve the maze, the total rhythm and detail of the accomplished resolution is irrelevant. What matters is the play of the process, the challenge of the progression. The drawn line of how it's done is merely a record of the past. It's a tangible echo of a process.

## 2. Consider my mind a maze.

*"Ideas Cannot fly. They need human heads."*

-P. D. Ouspensky

I first heard about the work of Peter Ouspensky while talking with a friend about my teaching philosophy. The Russian philosopher dealt with higher dimensions of existence. In Ouspensky's *The Psychology Of Man's Possible Evolution* he introduces the concept of how overpopulated modern cities may necessitate the human race evolving into a non-detrimental form of schizophrenia that would allow the species to coexist peacefully in a multiculturally dictated society.

The communal nature of humans first ordered us into a situational design of acquiring social values mimetically by observing the fellow members of our tribes who all shared the same primary socialization. As villages grew into towns, and towns grew into cities, the processes by which individuals inherited norms, customs and ideologies were not as obviously corresponding, making it harder to gauge a desirable, or 'moral', outcome to any given situation. In this way, Ouspensky believes we started to acquire new varieties of mental deficiencies based on the lack of any pervasively analogous moral code that could irrefutably validate or invalidate our interpersonal behaviors.

These supposed mental deficiencies are only deficient in regards to their failure in application. Ouspensky believes that they are actually modes of evolution in our species that are attempting to incorporate and develop multilaterally acquired ideological material and develop it into a form of internal harmony amongst external confusion. His proposed strategy towards this inner-unity-amongst-outer-chaos suggests a need to relinquish control of our reactions to external circumstances and internal stimuli. What he calls for bears a resemblance to schizophrenic symptoms of mental organization and is suggested only under the guidance of a "School of the Fourth Way". This Hubbardian obstruction to his finale of self-awareness is not entirely unexpected and adds a Vaudevillian esotericism to an otherwise stimulating proposition.

It is interesting to note that Ouspensky did not accept Freud's theories about the subconscious because he did not acknowledge that more than a handful of humans at any given time are functioning in the realm of consciousness, and then only in small glimpses. He believed that our memories and thought processes created only an illusion of consciousness. To Ouspensky we are all functioning in a state of waking sleep. Function can exist without consciousness just as consciousness can exist without function.

### 3. Consider my maze an invitation.

*"Life it is not just a series of calculations and a sum total of statistics, it's about experience, it's about participation, it is something more complex and more interesting than what is obvious."*

-Daniel Libeskind

My body of work is the tangible line that marks the process of solving the maze of thoughts that curve and twist in patterns of harmony and disharmony in my head. The works, as inventions of pure imagination, are not bound to any specific rules of structure beyond the sense that is made of them. They have the ability to associate disparate ideas and present them as conceptual models of what does not exist. In doing so they claim no possession to any given reality. They are only what they appear to be. They strive to take Plato's idea of art as an imitation of reality and present an unreality that is, none-the-less, perceived as a real thing. They are the symbol of the process of looking at them and attempting to solve and envision a solution to what you are looking at.

There is a dream-like concept of Kafkan logic where meanings of individual actions and objects can only have significance in relation to the other actions or objects that immediately precede and follow them. In this sense the significance of a given thing is not predetermined, but is relational only to its context in what Harold Bloom refers to as a Kafkan contingency<sup>i</sup>. This Kafkan Contingency of logic fits well within Ouspensky's belief that the human condition is one of waking sleep. In this waking sleep we see things not

for what they truly are, but only for what they seem to be in the situation that they appear in.

I'm working to present information in a manner that it is in accord with how we experience images in this contingent nature. I would like to put forward a non-sensical stream of stimulus that must be organized into a host system of sense. I understand things because my brain makes sense of them contingently. The works are not only *inventions* of imagination but *invitations* to imagine as well. This imagination is fueled by numerous mechanisms in the brain that act automatically to process information.

In James Elkins' *The Object Stares Back*, many of these neural mechanisms are presented. He describes our minds as having a human predisposition for cognitive invention. The author shows how our brains construct a very comfortable illusion out of a chaotic assortment of data. Elkins integrates the Lacanian idea that we maintain our sense of reality by perceiving the world in a real sense "in order to maintain the conviction that we are in control of our vision and ourselves (Elkins, 74)." Without this control we would have to assume that we were not the "autonomous, independent, stable (Ibid, 74)" selves that we claim to be. This false sense of control is validated by the trust we have in our own vision.

If I can make a viewer perceive a piece of work with these mechanisms, I will be able to supersede the need to be an authoritarian element in the construction of the work's meaning. I can let the viewer use the work as a



model for devising and envisioning their own maze. The paths they negotiate are not my paths, not my ideas, but merely a representation of coinciding meanings that the viewer brings to random symbols juxtaposed in an attempt to be arbitrary and subjective.

I emphasize this by trying to depict, as content, subject matter that is not directly attached to any one time or place. The use of rather abstract animal forms in my pieces is a device to alleviate any direct ties to one specific race or gender. The use of animals and their relation to humans comes also from traveling to India where the idea that animals possess souls and consciousness goes beyond mere animism to include animals as gods. In the midst of devastating poverty I found it easier to empathize with animals than other humans. Human suffering was almost impossible to bear, whereas the suffering of animals was uncomplicated and unproblematic. It was a pity that was easy during a time when pity was in high demand. The animals in my work are indeed correlated to human subjects. They function as easy and diverse recipients to otherwise complicated human conditions

The symbolic use of hands, clouds and water symbols further endeavors to disturb any attempt to exclude any individual connection by using inclusively relatable objects. The hand is democratic as an item of chosen content. It is a symbol of our evolved form because it contains our opposable thumb, yet it is also a politically neutral birthright of all human beings. The water symbols of drops and clouds also represent essential natural phenomenon

and elements that are known cross-culturally. The water also implies external elements as well as internal elements. Water as a required outside commodity is necessary for our survival, yet the bodies we reside in are also composed mostly of the substance. In these ways the loaded symbols allow for endless combinations of meaning and relational dynamics to any viewer depending on the individual viewer's personalized situational connection to water and their body. An endless game of describing relationships can be entered into.

In Nicolas Bourriaud's essay *Relational Aesthetics* this process is described as creating a dialogue that attempts to have no ending. His theories on relational aesthetics touch on and inspire many of the analytic parallels to the type of maze game I am interested in creating with my art. His essay describes contemporary art's movement towards a state of intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is the sharing of subjective states by multiple individuals. Considering Ouspensky's declaration that the entire race must eventually reach a state of multiply-coexisting personalities in order to achieve an inner harmony amongst outer chaos, it is interesting to apply Bourriaud's intersubjective theories to a single individual operating under the influence of multiple sets of values and various codes of conduct that are self contained.

Bourriaud theories ultimately point to contemporary art's shift to incorporate the sphere of human relations as a site for art to take place. This development from the traditional arrangement of art as a presented object in a tangible setting is attributed to the spread of urbanization after World War II.

The changes that came from this urbanization dealt severely with place and territory as more and more people cramped into the same cities. Rooms got smaller. Our personal spaces became harder to define. His picture of a tense society changing in order to apply itself to an increasingly chaotic environment parallels Ouspensky's theories of the future of the human condition and the types of accommodations we must make as a species to thrive despite the obstacles presented to us. With this cramping of space we simultaneously experienced an automation of daily tasks that once required human contact. With human contact on the decline, Bourriaud points to the necessity of art that deals with human interaction. Art that is intended for use by multiple viewers simultaneously begins to touch on theoretical concepts that I find applicable to Ouspensky's theories.

The idea of meanings being collectively elaborated by several different sources interests me in terms of how I would like my own work to be read. Bourriaud writes that art "brings us face to face with reality through the singularity of a relationship with the world, through a fiction (Bishop, 168)." The dream-like fiction of my art is offered merely as a material to be processed, determined and participated in.

As material to be processed, I often think of my works in terms of Ariadne's Thread and its link to solving mazes. In Greek mythology Ariadne is the daughter of King Minos. She falls in love with Theseus and gives him a ball of red fleece. The ball of red fleece is to be used as a method of tracking his

way through the Minotaur's maze. The term Ariadne's Thread also refers to a strategy for solving problems when there are multiple paths to proceed towards a solution. It is dependent on being presented with numerous restraints and obstructions. It is an exhaustive, ordered search where every opportunity is tried until the desired outcome is achieved. It is, in essence, about a process. This celebration of process is not unlike the methods in which I create my images. The methods I employ assume no correct solution but aspire to create all possible solutions.

As an artist I try to disassociate myself from the work by concentrating on the process above the image. The process is a puzzle in itself. It is a mere disciplined action that is followed through to completion. It gives the power of authorship over to a series of arbitrary choices. The designs that constitute my images are merely eventualities that are arrived at from the completion of a puzzle.

The disassociative manner of my creative style is a device I employ in order to see the finished work as a mere observer. My art satisfies me most when the finished product offers me the same opportunities as it offers anyone else. I work to produce pieces of art that surprise me. I want to look at them and see what I did not intend. I want to proceed through them as if they were not my own. In this way the work could be seen as a schizophrenic attempt to lose my identity as an artist as a form of art.

I truly believe that the sum total of many of these ideas brings us in touch with Roland Barthes and his *Death of the Author* essay of 1968. If we can Accept that the creator of any fiction, be it literature or art, is not the source of the fiction's explanation, then we can see how a internalized intersubjective reading can produce an extremely authentic and honest reaction from a viewer. This reaction, this solving of arbitrary information, is what I desire my work to achieve. As a practical model for life I would like the work to be a model of participation that takes place within the viewer amongst the conflicting questions we each are presented with and challenged to solve. I offer the puzzle that I have solved to my audience and challenge them to solve it for themselves.

## 4. Considering My Process

I often get the impression when other artists talk about their "work" they are referring to the outcome of a process and not the procedure of producing a product. My work is a verb. It is the action of creating. Understanding this difference is essential in order for me to center creative attention in a way that allows for the maximum of innovative possibilities and variations of similar ideas.

My process has been devised around the intention of allowing me to work without regard to any specific composition. The imagery exists in no committed composition until the final step of collaging printed, hand-worked pieces into a conclusive arrangement. In this way, the ultimate format of each print is left open to a variety of options until the moment it is completed, while retaining the look and feel of traditional printing processes that require more committed plans of execution.

For my final thesis work I began my process by randomly filling entire sheets of paper with a dense network of line drawn images (figure 1). These backgrounds were intended to represent, literally, background information. The resultant drawings were shot onto screens and printed in white ink on white paper. This initial step laid a base of drawing for each print that essentially functioned as negative space yet consisted of vast amounts of visual data.

For the main figural elements in these prints I screen printed large, pattern-filled elements onto thin Japanese paper that was cut out and applied to the white on white backgrounds (figure 2). The imagery I used consisted of computer manipulated pornographic depictions of bodies in suggestive poses filled with minutely detailed line patterns. The eventual result of the minuscule lines in the pattern created an optically stimulating result that seemed to move and pulse with its own energy.

The method of applying these figures to the backgrounds consisted of coating both sides of the cutout with a thin layer of acrylic medium using a wide, soft-bristled brush. Once dried, a third application of acrylic medium was brushed onto the surface as an adhesive and mounted flat using the pressure of the intaglio press while the medium was still wet. The multiple coatings of medium on the thin paper allowed for a maximum amount of transparency that could be utilized for a number of visual nuances depending on the consequence treatment of the pieces before application to the final print.

As a final step in treating the figural pieces I hand-painted color accents on the anterior side of the figure to capitalize on the optical disorientation produced by the patterning. In many cases the posterior side was adorned with hand-painted silhouette figures that seemed to be embedded between the transparent material and the background layer once mounted.



Figure 1



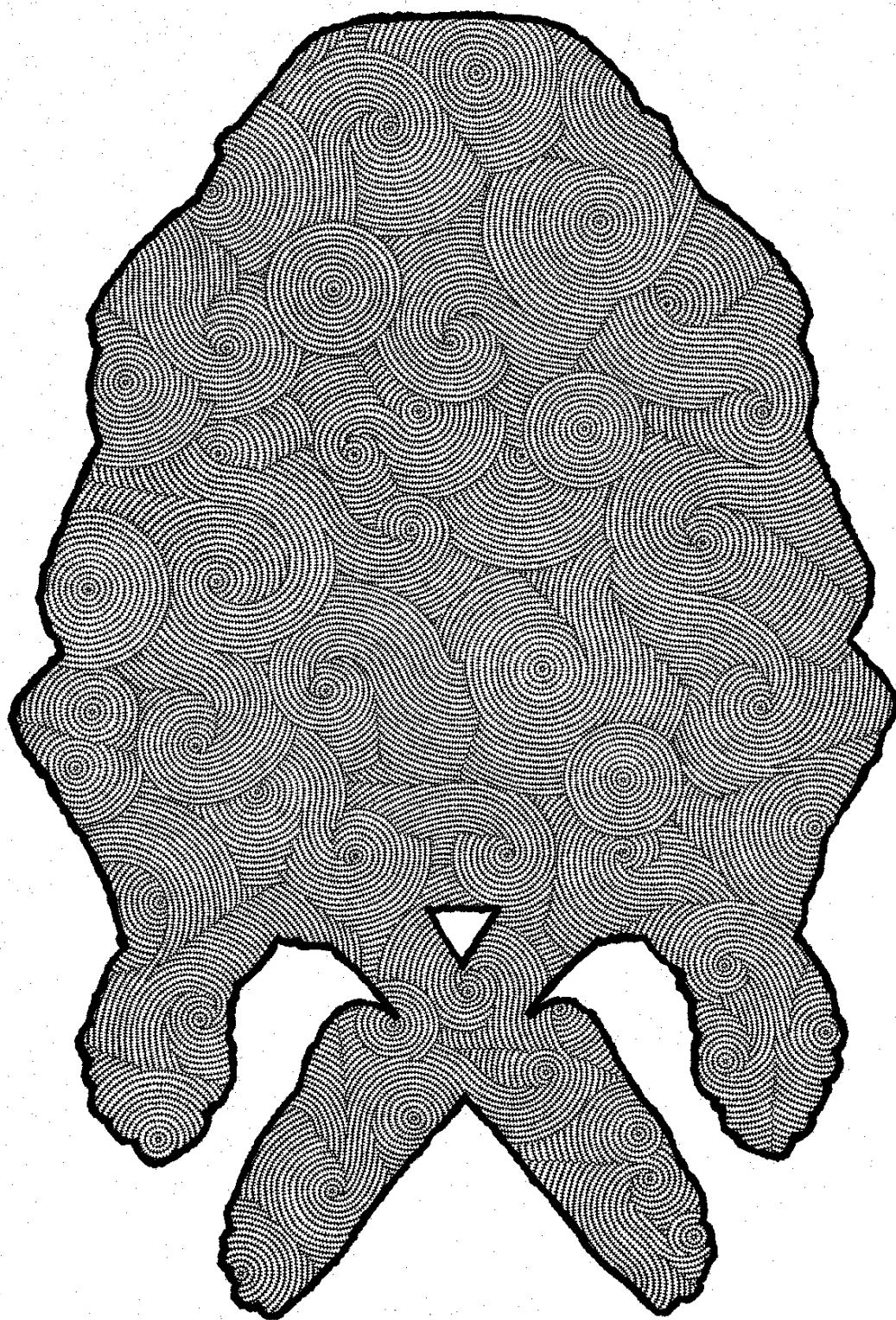


Figure 2

## Resources

Bishop, Claire. *Participation (Documents of Contemporary Art)*. New York: The MIT, 2006. Print.

Elkins, James. *Object stares back on the nature of seeing*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1997.

Uspenski , P. D. *Psychology of man's possible evolution*. New York: Vintage Books, 1973.

## Works Cited

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<sup>i</sup> Harold Bloom, "Introduction" to *Franz Kafka: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, 1986), p. 4.